

HEIRS OF THE PROPHETS

Acts 3:9-26

TEXT: *When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you-- even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.' "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

It's hard to be Lutheran, a TRUE LUTHERAN, that is. At the end of today's service we will sing hymn 293, "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage," a favorite of many Lutherans. We acknowledge what we have inherited by God's grace as Peter reminded the Jews: *... you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'*... for we are heirs of this blessed Gospel of salvation through faith alone in Jesus through the blessed Lutheran Reformation. So in hymn 293 we sing this prayer: **Lord, grant, while worlds endure, We keep its teachings pure Throughout all generations.**

But if God answers that prayer among us, we should expect difficult times among those who are not Christians. That's because they will hate you for telling them the truth about what we have done to Jesus by our sins, and they will hate you for telling them that their "off-white" Christianity is no Christianity at all. We live in a culture and among a people who have become satisfied with an "off-white" kind of purity. It also affects our thinking and behavior when we find ourselves to be unaffected by the Word of God, both Law and Gospel. So it is very hard to be a Lutheran.

But it remains that we are HEIRS OF THE PROPHETS, who boldly tell us what we did to Jesus, and then refresh us with what Jesus did for us.

Many people are going to experience a sad surprise on Judgment Day when they find that God requires, not an "off-white" holiness, but perfect holiness, without stain or blemish. Something had to happen to the Jews in order to jolt them into a renewed knowledge of the horror of sin. They had to be told that even though they had been visited by God when He raised them up as His people from Abraham, when He had saved them from Egypt with an outstretched arm named Moses, when they had been visited by the prophets from Moses through Samuel and up until the last one named Malachi wrote the last book of the Old Testament... yet, they were confident of their own "off-white" righteousness, which is not perfect enough for salvation.

The Jewish population had just witnessed the Lord's miraculous healing of a noted beggar who had been crippled from birth. When the Jews questioned Peter about the miracle, Peter turned their attention to a great sin, which they had all committed: *Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life...* What Abraham, Isaac and Jacob longed to see, they ignored. What their forefathers worshipped in spirit and in truth, they disowned and killed!

Peter jolted his fellow Jews with the events of Jesus' crucifixion in which they had participated. Because we live among a people that is satisfied with its "off-white" holiness, God's Law is needed to show us our own sins so that we know the meaning of our confession: "I am a poor miserable sinner..." And while we live in a world that thinks that there is nothing so wrong about a little lust for wealth and money, a little pornography, sexual sins, lying, selfishness, cheating, etc. we can easily be lulled into thinking that an "off-white" color of faith isn't going to damn us or anyone else.

Peter told them: *Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.* Can this be said of us? We who stand and sing "God's Word is our great heritage..."? Is there any excuse for Lutherans who have been given God's Word in its truth and purity ever to weaken and fall into sin? Are we afraid that the world will hate us if we stand on the commandments and warn people of their sin? The world will indeed hate us, but are we afraid to tell others and ourselves that it is our sin for which Christ was crucified?

There can be no Gospel of salvation among people who feel that they need to salvation. But where there is a people who is no longer ignorant of their sin, the Gospel is the ultimate comfort. There is hope in what God has done for us in Christ: *But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you-- even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.*

The Jews thought that they had been focused on God. They had the Temple, the sacrifices, the rabbinical codes, the history. But since they had rejected Jesus, they had

rejected God. Yet not all was lost: *You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.* Jesus, who was crucified, was raised to life and now lives and rules His Kingdom. It is by faith in His name that we are made righteous before God and made perfectly holy and righteous before God. No more off-white, sin-stained beings, but cleansed by the blood of Jesus, we are perfect in the sight of God.

Suddenly the ancient prophet Isaiah's words were wonderful in their eyes: *Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.* Is 1 The next chapter of Acts says this: *The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.* Ac 4 Those who believed what Peter had declared were separated into a special group of people: **the Communion of Saints.**

Years later, Peter wrote about those who turn to God through faith in Christ: *...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* 1Pe 2:9 This is what we are! The very same Name has been handed down to us, separating us by faith into a *royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...* As "royal priests" we have the power and authority to do what this priesthood is charged to do: *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* This is mission work, evangelism, in its true sense. You have inherited the Word. You can tell what is sin and can warn the sinner that this is God's Word, believe it or not. You can refresh the heart of the sinner with the sin that put Jesus on the cross what taken away by what Jesus did for us. Nothing but pure white perfect righteousness and holiness can stand before God, and Christ has made that happen!

As heirs of the prophets and God's Word, lets tell that to people! Perhaps some might hear and believe and become members with us of the Communion of Saints!
Amen